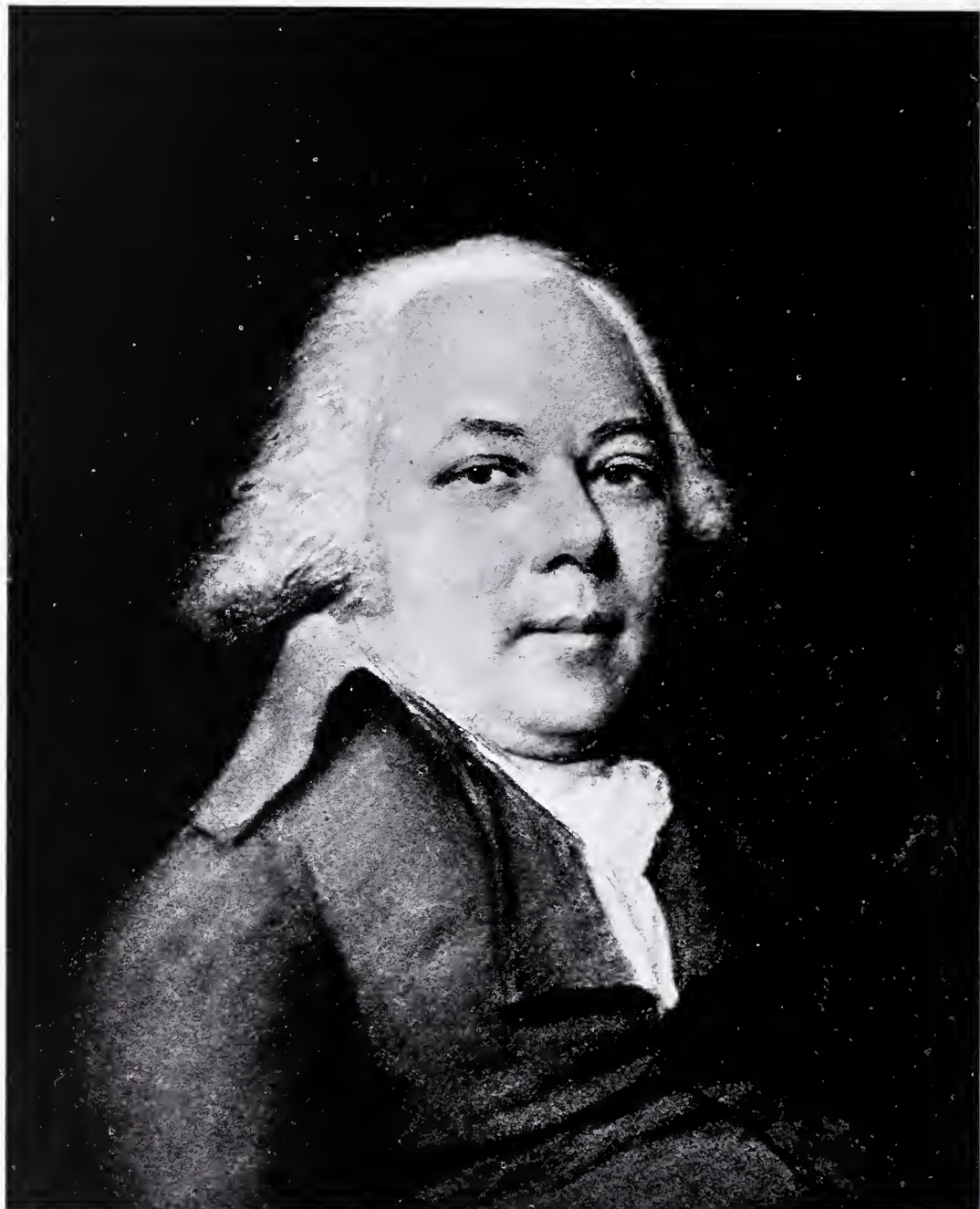


Dance Index



Moreau de Saint-Mery and Danse

by Lillian Moore



Portrait of an Unknown Gentleman.
(Moreau de Saint-Méry? See pp. 245, 246)

James Sharples
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Dance Index

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Comment

Readers of *Dance Index* will need no introduction to Lillian Moore, who has already contributed studies on The Petipa Family in Europe and America (May, 1942), John Durang (August, 1942), Mary Ann Lee (May, 1943), and George Washington Smith (June, 1945). In this issue she examines the status and character of the dance in Haiti from pre-Revolutionary days, and discusses the influence of a little-known tract on the subject, written by a cultivated French gentleman in 1789. To those who associate scholarship and research only with aged academicians solemnly pursuing their studies in lonely quiet, Miss Moore is a refreshing proof of their error. She not only writes authoritatively and extensively on dancing but is, herself, a dancer; and after several seasons as soloist with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet, embarked on a strenuous tour of the Pacific area with a U.S.O. group. Always intellectually curious, she has the patience and discrimination necessary for constructive exploration, and the humor to render her findings entertaining as well as informative.

The little book *Danse* has nothing spectacular about it to attract the average person, but to Miss Moore it fairly shouted for investigation. Her subsequent research succeeds not only in presenting a wealth of informa-

tion and comment on the background and heritages of dancing in the West Indies; but because she possesses the faculty of projecting her interest into the motivating forces of the people with whom she deals, the whole culture and society of another age comes vividly to life, and the specific topic—dancing—gains important interest from its clearly delineated relation to its environment.

West Indian dancing today, as we know it from dance-bands and a few theatrical exponents, suggests little of the diverse influences which have moulded it. We are prone to refer loosely to "African" and "Negro" rhythms, and "Spanish" style, without knowing very clearly just what we mean, and quite ignoring the native Indian, and French colonial cultures which dominated the character of dancing before the influx of African Negro slaves imported by the Spanish. Even the classic Greek imprint has its supporters, and Miss Moore offers unbiased evidence from various authoritative sources as to the relative importance of all these influences, and the way in which their characteristics have fused and persisted up to the present time.

M.E.

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Cover: Primitive religious dance ceremony in Haiti. 17th century engraving after de Bry (ca. 1600). See text p. 253.

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Moreau de Saint-Méry and Danse

by Lillian Moore

One hundred and fifty years ago there was published, in Philadelphia, a slender little volume called *Danse*. Its author, M. L. E. Moreau de Saint-Méry, was a distinguished French emigré who had been forced to flee from Paris during the Revolution. His little book, one of the very first on the subject to be issued in the United States, dealt with primitive dancing in general, and the negro dance on the island of Haiti (then called Santo Domingo) in particular.

Its extreme rarity and the fact that it was one of the very few books printed at Moreau de Saint-Méry's press in Philadelphia have made it a bibliographical curiosity much sought after by lovers of fine and early

printing. It is less well known among those who would be primarily interested in its subject matter.

A century ago, *Danse* was not so neglected by dancers. Carlo Blasis brazenly plagiarized several of its pages, which he simply translated from French into English and published as part of his famous *Code of Terpsichore*, without so much as a nod of acknowledgement to the original author of the material. Almost the entire book (it runs to only 62 pages) was pirated and re-published, anonymously, in Paris, about 1830. Now, however, the very existence of the book has been forgotten. Simply as a bit of early Americana of the dance, it deserves re-examination.

Le Port de Nippe. Engraving by Nicholas Ponce. From collection of illustrations published to accompany Moreau's book on French colonial law.



DANSE: EXCERPTS AND COMMENTS

At the beginning of *Danse*, Moreau de Saint-Méry describes the most primitive origins of dancing:

"When man feels joyful, he expresses this through movements similar to those of the dance, and if this happiness is shared by several people, it is natural that they should join together, almost involuntarily, holding hands, linking arms, in a way which binds them together, so that their movements are mingled and shared with each other.

Doubtless there is an enormous gap between this expression of joy by primitive man, and the sensual graces of the dances of civilized peoples, but it is easy to see that in this, as in a host of other things, art has only to embellish nature.

In spite of the noise and confusion produced when a large number of people are united in expressions of joy, as soon as these expressions assume the form of a dance, even of the crudest sort, a sort of orderly ensemble is established. This is demonstrated in the round dance. . . . All the participants are linked in a circle, each one sees all the others, and the chain formed by all the arms becomes the regulator of the movements of the dancers.

One can imagine how, when the number of dancers was not too large, when the dance was not the effect of an immediate satisfaction, but rather the expression of a happy memory, or a means of finding relaxation in pleasure, the dissonant cries of a delirious crowd were replaced by a few individual voices. A single singer would give even more unity to the dance, and the loudest voice would take the first place, until taste, which eventually suggests new refinements, had learned to prefer flexible tones to the crude outbursts of a primitive throat. . . .

Finally, the inventions of musical instruments would have come to lend to the dance charms hitherto unknown. . . .

This brief picture, which covers many centuries, leads us to foresee all the development of the dance. We can imagine how, adapting itself to the character of different races, and even to the ideas of different classes of the same peoples, it has undergone all sorts of modifications; and cannot we ourselves observe in the same day, the simple

joy of peasants, inspired by the sound of a musette to jump about in a circle, with movements hardly notable for their lightness, and the enchanting magic of the Guimards, the Saulniers, the Millers, the d'Aubervals, the Vestris, the Gardels, the Theodores, the Nivelons, the Labories, whose every step is directed by the graces."

In a later, pirated edition of *Danse*, the names of these eighteenth-century stars, Guimard, Gardel, Vestris, and the rest, were replaced by those of "modern" artists: Taglioni, Noblet, Montessu, Albert, Paul, and Coulon, all of whom were appearing at the Paris Opera about 1830. To return to the observations of Moreau de Saint-Méry:

"The ancients had solemn dances which assumed a character analagous to that of the persons who were being honored, or of the events which were being commemorated. Sometimes serious, sometimes lively, sometimes governed by the most austere modesty, at other times frightening, these dances always depicted the spirit and characteristics of a race.

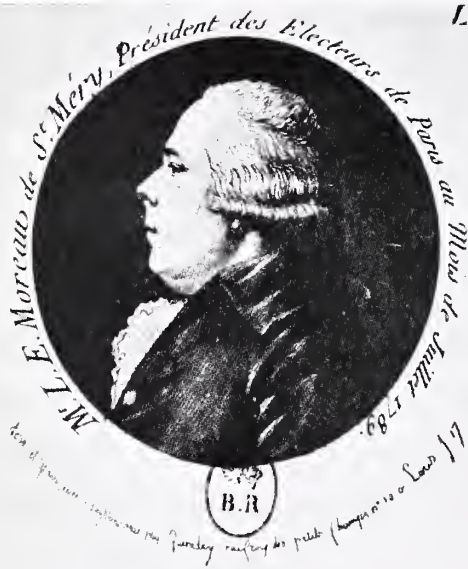
Sometimes the dance was designed to retrace the picture of a battle, so that even in his games the warrior could nourish his soul with sentiments which would inspire him to further glory. . . . A glorious event would be reproduced, in the same way, under the eyes of the entire population, and patriotism, awakened in every heart through the power of the senses, made each one burn with the desire to live and die for his country. . . .

There has not been a single religion which has not adopted some form of dancing in order to spread its influence or conserve the idea of its primitive foundation; the memory of the celebrated dances dedicated to Bacchus is still with us. The time is not yet far distant, when even among the Christians, at certain times or on special days, the priests and the faithful took each other by the hand, dancing in circles in the churches. . . .

The dance among civilized people is subjected, like almost every phase of their customs, to the caprices of fashion, while simple or savage races . . . preserve a form of dance which is practically invariable. . . . Perhaps the dances of different peoples could even serve as a gradual scale, to measure their degree of civilization."

Moreau de Saint-Méry had a favorite theory that there was a definite relationship between dancing and climate. Ignoring the

Lat.



Moreau de St. Méry.
 ex Constituant, ancien Conseiller d'Etat
 et Administrateur Général, des Etats de
 France. Plaisance en Guastalla, Command.
 de l'Ord. de la S. J. H. membre de
 plusieurs Sociétés de sciences et d'arts.

Moreau de Saint-Méry. Engraving by Quenedy.

highly advanced folk dances of the Russians, Poles, and Scandinavians, he contended that warm climates were very propitious to the dance, whereas in colder zones it failed to develop. He devotes about ten pages of *Danse* to the exposition of this theory, a theory which is echoed by Carlo Blasis who synopsized it in a few carefully selected sentences which he translated word for word and inserted in no less than three of his works: *The Code of Terpsichore*, its second edition, called *The Art of Dancing*, and *Notes Upon*

Dancing. In the following paragraph the translation of Blasis is used:

The (dance) appears to have been created for the climates that are under the influence of a torrid sun. It is a pleasure everywhere,—there it is a passion; warmed by an incessant heat, the glowing constitution of the native of the south contains the seed of every pleasure; each moment of his rapid existence seems to him made only for enjoyment. The inhabitant of the north, on the other hand, forced by nature to maintain a constant combat with the rigors of the seasons, seldom aspires to delight; his whole care is engrossed in securing himself from snows and frosts. The roughness of his manners almost extinguishes any sensibility, and those delicate feelings arising from exciting pleasures are to him wholly unknown. How could dancing, that charming offspring of delight, display her graceful attractions amid the continual snow of ice-bound climates?

This theory of Moreau's, which he had published in 1796, was copied by Blasis in 1830. Moreau de Saint-Méry, however, demonstrated his point by specific examples:

What I have just said about the relationship which exists between dancing and climate . . . is easy to prove by observation, and since America is the principal object of my researches, it is easy for me to find there proofs of the theory which I advance.

One would seek in vain for dancing with its lively movements among the inhabitants of the more northern parts of America. The Eskimos, frozen in spite of the furs which cover them, are incessantly preoccupied with securing subsistence for the stormy winter season. The people who live even farther north, those hardly ever warmed by the star of day, are still less apt than the Eskimos to find pleasure in dancing. This fate is common to almost all the inhabitants of the same latitudes, and the Laplander would never be cited as a lover of the dance.

But in passing through the section which lies between the 50th degree of latitude and the edge of the tropics, one finds people more or less devoted to dancing, according to their particular climate, their customs and the nature of their tastes. I am not speaking only of Europeans, who have transplanted their former habits to the New World, but of the natives. In fact, the savages of Canada, of the Mississippi, and of all this vast continent have their own dances, in which one can distinguish the character of the savage Algonquin, the

proud Natchez, and even the ferocious tribes of ancient Virginia, who took delight in the sight of human sacrifice. Thus the soul of each tribe is depicted in its dances. . . .

General observation shows us that the dancing of all the native tribes between the 25th and 50th degree of latitude, is sad and monotonous. A drum which is beaten, and songs which resemble a psalmody, provoke movements in which both strength and humor participate. Ever since the insatiable cupidity of the Europeans has given an immoderate taste for strong liquor to these men, so that it is necessary rather to soothe than to stimulate their passions, their dances have become more mournful, and have been the cause of quarrels and fights.

Now if we consider the inhabitants of the tropics, we find them charmed by the dance, and delivering themselves to its pleasures with sensuous enjoyment. Local climate and manner of living have an influence on this pastime, as upon all other tribal characteristics. Guiana alone suffices to prove this, since the Indian hunters there are little disposed towards dancing, which would be merely another source of fatigue for them, while the agricultural Indians cherish the dance and count it among their sweetest delights.

Everything, then, confirms this fact, that the dance is a kind of ecstasy for those peoples under the most direct and constant influence of the sun; they deliver themselves up to it without reservation, and the persistent desire for dancing only waits for renewed strength to commence the same pastime again.

There is a further proof of this influence in the colonies of America, in comparing the dances of their inhabitants with those of different European metropolises. Fashion shows, in this respect, as strong a rule as in the great centers themselves; for example, in the French colonies, the minuet had its reign, then contredanses, like the rigaudon or the allemande. Sometimes it is the anglaise which is in favor, sometimes one must know how to waltz and make jetés-battus, or renounce the right to count oneself an expert dancer. But the influence of climate is felt in the depth and duration of the passion for dancing, the enthusiasm with which it is pursued, and the fear of losing a single occasion to practice it.

These Creoles with their languorous bearing, of which indolence seems to be the dominant characteristic, take on new life at a ball. In all their movements there is a naive and touching grace; their glances are animated and voluptuous; with light steps they beat out a measure which Europeans would have difficulty in following. . . .

Moreau de Saint-Méry next devotes six pages to the praises of the physical charms of Creole women, to whom he seems to have been extremely susceptible! He blames it all on dancing, however, and the sensual atmosphere of a tropical ball:

What powerful magic is found in the dance! . . . Already, one of the senses is acutely moved by the sound of the instruments, the sight is flattered by all which fashion has been able to invent, and all the attractions which a ball unites, among the beauties which it assembles; the sense of smell is charmed by the perfumes which the toilette has employed, and when all these sensations are augmented by the dance itself, their power is almost irresistible. How well love knows this power, how great is its empire, how many triumphs it obtains, during a ball!

The French colonial proprietors of the huge sugar and indigo plantations, which were operated by slave labor, lived in the most extravagant luxury. Moreau de Saint-Méry attests that he has seen young ladies change their ball gowns no less than five times during a single evening, while a dress once worn to even one-fifth of a party was never allowed to make its appearance again! The balls were conducted according to strict etiquette.

Formerly the pleasure of the dance was lessened by a sort of pride, which had established a particular ceremonial for the balls. Elaborate system and even research were necessary in order to decide who should open the ball, and in what order each guest should dance his first minuet. There was a master of ceremonies, or several of them, whose duties were painful, disagreeable, and even dangerous: painful, because he had to see that the list was followed; disagreeable, because it was almost inevitable that some heiress should complain that she was being forced to dance out of turn, after some other lady, whose genealogy she listed with most critical comments, because the preferred one was prettier; dangerous, because all this discontent rebounded upon the master of ceremonies, who sometimes had the duty of forbidding the entrance of masked persons, or those without invitations, and in this region where there is such a passion for dancing, this was often difficult. Such a master of ceremonies was obliged to compro-

mise his life in order to maintain the dignity of his position.

Finally it was realized that relaxation is not a course in etiquette, and for some time now, after the grand-parents have made a show of starting the minuet, contredanses are informally arranged. The host and hostess watch to see that everyone has a good time. . . .

At intervals the contredanses are interrupted by minuets, danced by the older people or by dancers whose talents are capable of winning applause, in spite of the severity with which it has been customary to judge the minuet in recent years. When the gentlemen begin to tire, and the ladies speak of leaving, that is the signal for all the other dances: the Allemandes, the Anglaise, and the Minuet Congo.

It is infuriating to find that Moreau de Saint-Méry makes not the slightest explanation of this last provocative title. The Minuet Congo! Would it be possible to find more contradictory terms? What on earth could it have been? A Minuet considerably altered by the influence of the African dances of the slaves, probably. (It suggests to us a certain irreverent passage in Jerome Robbins's one-year-old ballet *Interplay!*)

The Minuet itself has survived among the peasants in the most remote mountains of Haiti, and is still to be seen there today. The slaves originally learned it, during the eighteenth century, from their masters, whom they loved to imitate. Moreau de Saint-Méry has more to say about this later on.* He continues:

As such a passion for dancing is somewhat detrimental to the health, in a climate where sitting up all night is trying, they decided at Santo Domingo, about 1780, to substitute for the public all-night balls, gatherings called *Redoutes*, which take place twice a week, and last only from five o'clock until nine in the evening. The amusement is shorter, but more frequent, and mothers no longer have the pretext of fatigue to keep their daughters away from the dances. At Cap Francais I have seen *redoutes* where, among twenty-four ladies, it would have been difficult to make a choice. . . .

The freedmen and their descendants are also

passionately fond of dancing. They follow the whites exactly in their choice of dances, and the fashion is common to both on this point. However, dancing has hitherto had an additional charm for them, because it is not always permitted, and difficulty is a great seasoning for pleasure!

In certain colonies, the free negresses only dance among themselves, because the others do not admit them to their festivities. It is not surprising that in places where all the advantages belong to one class, other individuals should take pride in proximity to that class; and consequently mingling with white blood inspires the negroes with an idea of superiority.

Another point which is somewhat bizarre, is that in places where the freed women of all shades mingle together, and also in those colonies where different shades form different social classes, there exist balls where the freed women dance only with white men, without wishing to receive any men of the same color as themselves.

In order for the balls of the colored women to offer a sight agreeable to the eye, they ought to stop believing that they should make indiscriminate use of accessories worn by the whites. How can they fail to see that the same flower is not equally becoming to the languorous blond and the piquant brunette, that the greatest contrasts command the greatest attention? And why do they not have their own coquetry? They should realize that the analogy of movements is not just simple imitation, that it is necessary to study these dainty balancings, these *petits-pas* and these *tableaux* which the graces invented, and which only the graces can reproduce.

However, they dance for themselves alone, they are delighted to dance, and such is their natural aptitude, such is the precision of their musical ear, that the slightest instruction by a dancing-master would make them pupils whom many Europeans could not equal. They are beginning to realize this, there are already places where they go for lessons, in order to try to unite with the pleasures of the ball, those of self-respect, the heritage of all the human race without distinction of color. Is it not self-respect, for example, which inspires them with the idea that at one of their balls one can enter only if dressed in taffeta, at another, only in muslin, and at still another, only in linen!

Among the slaves there are some, such as the domestic servants, who are always in close contact with the whites, witnesses of all their amusements, enjoying many privileges because of a thousand circumstances originating in their domestic service,

* See the section on *The Dance in Haiti*.

who consider themselves a sort of intermediary class between the slaves and the freedmen, and who adopt in many things the manners of the latter. Their dance, then, is the same as that of the whites, except for those piquant differences caused by the actual nature of different personalities, and they are permitted to have gatherings among themselves. It is necessary to see these balls in order to conceive of all their singularity, and Calot or Teniers would have employed their brushes well, if they had only had these grotesque scenes to depict.

The final twenty pages of *Danse* are devoted to a discussion of the dances brought from Africa by the slaves, with a brief pas-

sage on the dancing of the Carib Indians, the native aborigines of the West Indies. This material is fascinating enough to warrant the quotation of the entire section.

The negro, when he avoids the foolish desire to imitate, has a form of dancing which belongs to him, and which, brought originally from Africa, has a great charm for the people born in this part of the world. The Creole negroes are fond of it too, because they have known it since tenderest infancy.

The African people serve me here as proof of the passion for the dance held by the inhabitants of the tropics, since they are all sensitive to this pleasure.

Haitian aborigines encountering the Spanish invaders. Engraving, Amsterdam, 1662.



The negroes of the Gold Coast, warlike, bloody, accustomed to human sacrifice, know only dances as ferocious as themselves, while those from the Congo, the Senegalese and other African shepherds or agricultural tribes, love dancing as a relaxation, as a source of sensual pleasure. Brought from all parts of Africa to our Colonies, whose climate is analogous to theirs, the negroes brought here and preserved their taste for the dance, a taste so strong that, however tired out from work the negro may be, he always finds strength to dance and even to travel a long distance to satisfy this desire.

When the negroes want to dance, they take two drums, that is, two hollow logs, of unequal length, with one end open, while the other is covered with sheepskin. These drums (of which the smaller is called *Bamboula*, because it is sometimes made of a very thick bamboo which has been scooped out) resound under blows of the wrist and movements of the fingers of a negro who sits astride of each drum. The larger drum is beaten slowly, the other more rapidly. This monotonous and hollow sound is accompanied by the noise of a certain number of calabashes which have been filled with pebbles, and which are pierced lengthwise by a long handle which is used in shaking them. Several *Banzas*, a sort of large guitar with four strings, join in the concert, the tempo of which is regulated by the clapping hands of the negro women, who form a large circle. They form a sort of chorus which responds to one or two strident solo voices, which repeat or improvise a song.

A male and a female dancer, or several dancers, divided into an equal number of each sex, jump into the center of the circle and begin to dance, always two by two. This dance, which varies very little, consists of a very simple step in which one foot is put forward after the other, and then drawn back quickly while striking the toe and the heel on the ground, as in the *Anglaise*. Some turns in place, or around the woman, who turns also and changes places with her partner; that is all which one sees, except for the movement of the arms which the man raises and lowers with the elbows quite close to the body and the hands almost closed; the woman holds the two ends of a handkerchief, which she waves. When one has not seen this dance, one would hardly believe how lively and animated it is, and how much grace it derives from the strictness with which the musical rhythm is followed. The dancers replace one another without respite, and the negroes are so intoxicated with pleasure, that it is necessary to force them to conclude dances of this sort,

called *Kalendas*.*

It would be difficult to misinterpret the characteristics of this simple, primitive dance, belonging to a comparatively uncivilized people. The circular formation, the clapping of hands, the singing of the refrain, the noisy instruments, all attest the antiquity of this dance which, as I have said, comes from Africa, where its characteristic features exist everywhere, even among the Hottentots.

In Santo Domingo, and especially in the western, French section, there has existed for a long time a kind of dance called *Vaudoux*, which demands two or three persons, and which is characterized by movements where the upper part of the body, the shoulders, and the head seem to move convulsively. This dance is accompanied by the drums, the clapping of hands and group singing. I do not know where it gets its name, but its effect on the negroes is so powerful that sometimes they dance until they fall unconscious.

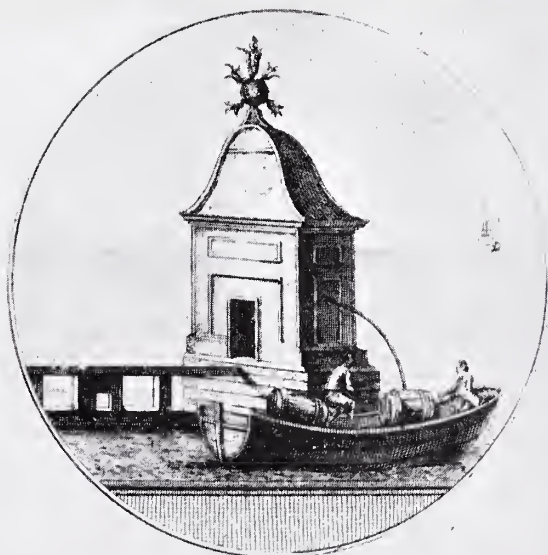
The *Vaudoux* is nothing, compared to the *Don Pédro* or *Danse à Don Pédro*, another negro dance, also known in the western part of Santo Domingo, since 1768. Don Pédro was the name of a negro of the Petit-Goave section, of Spanish origin, who, by his daring character and certain superstitious practices, had acquired, among the negroes, enough influence to be denounced by the government as the instigator of some alarming plots.

The dance which bears his name consists, like the *Vaudoux*, in the shaking of the shoulders and the head, but this shaking is extremely violent, and to increase it still further, the negroes drink, while dancing, brandy in which they have mixed finely ground gunpowder. The effect of this drink, hastened and augmented by their movements, has such a strong influence that they fall into a veritable fury, into actual convulsions; they dance with the most horrible contortions, until finally they fall into a sort of epilepsy, in which state they seem in imminent danger of death. It has been necessary to absolutely forbid Don Pédro, because it caused great disorder and awakened ideas contrary to the public peace. Whether it is a contagious influence, or electrical effect, even

*Moreau de Saint-Méry asserts that this name comes from the Celtic Gal-venda, "which means *Appelle donc*, doubtless from the beating of the drums." H. E. Krehbiel, however, believes that the name comes from the Spanish, *Que linda*.



PLACE ET FONTAINE MONTARCHER,
DEVANT LE GOUVERNEMENT,
au Cap-François, Isle S.^t Dominique.



FONTAINE D'ESTAING.
AU CAP-FRANÇOIS.
Isle S.^t Dominique.



COSTUMES
DES AFFRANCHES ET DES ESCLAVES.
des Colonies.



COSTUMES
DES AFFRANCHES ET DES ESCLAVES.
des Colonies.



BLANCHISSEUSES.



AFFRANCHIS DES COLONIES.



DANSE DE NÈGRES.



NÈGRES JOUANT AU BÂTON.

the spectators participate in this intoxication, and instead of ceasing their chanting when they see frenzy coming on, they redouble the strength of their voices, hasten the rhythm, and accelerate the crisis while participating in it to a certain extent. How strange is man! In what excesses he seeks pleasure!

Our Creole customs have adopted another exotic product which, also coming from Africa, has had the most general influence of all the negro dances which I have described. It is a dance known almost everywhere in the American colonies, under the name of the *Chica*, which it bears in the Windward Islands and in Santo Domingo.

When one wishes to dance the *Chica*, several instruments play a melody, which is absolutely dedicated to this kind of dance, and in which the rhythm is very plainly marked. For the woman, who holds the ends of a handkerchief or the two sides of her apron, the art of this dance consists chiefly in moving the lower part of the loins, while holding the rest of the body almost motionless. To enliven the *Chica*, a man approaches the woman who is dancing, throws himself suddenly forward, falling so that he almost touches her, draws back, and then darts forward again, while seeming to implore her to yield to the desires which she seems to feel.

The preceding paragraph was transcribed almost word for word by Carlo Blasis in *The Code of Terpsichore* (1830), *The Art of Dancing* (1831), and *Notes Upon Dancing* (1847). In the next paragraph we follow Blasis's translation in order to make the parallel even more obvious. Blasis follows Moreau de Saint-Méry's text quite literally, although he gives not a hint of the source of his information.

When the *Chica* is danced with its most expressive characteristics, there is, in the gestures and movements of the two dancers, a certain appearance better understood than described. The scene, in fact, offers to the eye all that is lascivious and voluptuous. It is a kind of contest, in which every amorous trick, and every means of conquest, are put into action. Fear, hope, disdain, tenderness, caprice, pleasure, refusals, flights, delirium, despair, all are here expressed, and the inhabitants of Paphos would have honored the inventor of it as a divinity. I shall not attempt to detail what impressions the sight of this dance must pro-

duce, when executed with all the voluptuousness of which it is susceptible. It animates every feature, awakens the whole train of a certain class of feelings, and would even disturb the sober imagination of old age.

Blasis chose only a few sentences from the next paragraphs, to incorporate bodily into his work. We have indicated his plagiarisms by italics:

The *Chica* was danced, not long ago, by lovely young ladies whose naïve graces embellished it and made it even more seductive. They danced it alone, it is true, or with one of their companions, who took the part of the man, without daring to fully imitate his vivacity. But our manners have not remained pure enough for such a test to be attempted; *the Chica is now banished from the balls of the white ladies, and is only sometimes performed in a few circles*, in which the small and select number of spectators reassures the dancers.

It is to the negresses of the Dutch island of Curaçao, that it is necessary to grant the palm for their manner of dancing the *Chica*; it is difficult to imagine to what a degree they know how to achieve the effects they seek; it goes so far, that the bust seems quite independent of the hips, which they shake with an agility which is even tiring to watch.

The *Chica* comes to us from the countries of Africa, *where every tribe dances it, and particularly the natives of the Congo. The negroes carried it with them to the Antilles, where it soon became naturalized.*

Blasis deemed the next passage worthy of inclusion in its entirety:

This dance was so universal throughout South America and the West Indies, that, at the commencement of the present century, it was always danced in religious ceremonies and processions. Even nuns, during the night of Christmas Eve, showed themselves to the public through the gratings of their convent, expressing, by the indecent motions of the *Chica*, the joy they felt for the birth of Christ, who came to take away the sins of the world. This dance is passionately admired among the Creoles, who enthusiastically adopted it on its introduction among them.

America is not the only country that has been influenced by Africa in dancing; it was, in fact,

from the Moors that Spain first received the dance now so peculiar to that country, namely, the Fandango, which is no other than the Chica, under a more decent form; the climate, and other circumstances, not permitting of the latter with all its native concomitants.

Through Blasis's works this theory about the African origin of the Fandango and its relationship to the Chica found its way into several nineteenth-century books on dancing. To return to Moreau de Saint-Méry's more original researches:

It would be interesting to try to discover in what country this expressive dance had its origin. It has been attributed to the negroes of the Guinea Coast, but a powerful fact opposes the adoption of this explanation: that is, the nudity of these Africans. Who does not know that nature loses, for men who go without clothes, the greatest part of the charms which have been attributed to its sweetest pleasures? Where would they have derived all the delightful nothings, all the gradations of desire, so well expressed in the Chica? What comparison could be established, for example, between this dance and that of the naked Caribs, of the island of Saint-Vincent, who take each other by the arm, two by two, and while clucking in monotonous, melancholy tones, alternately bend and rise, for hours at a time, and believe that they have danced?

Perhaps the Caribs and the inventors of the Chica had something in common, love of dancing and the effect of climate, but what a difference in customs must be imagined!

This observation involuntarily recalls to my mind the unhappy aborigines of Santo Domingo, who had several historical dances, including a sort of Pyrrhic dance and some as voluptuous as the Chica.

They were nude, I know, but history has revealed to us enough facts for us to believe that the Indians of the four great islands of the Antilles came originally from the Continent. Doubtless they had had sufficient communication with civilized peoples to realize that charms hidden from curious eyes are sometimes more powerful. This idea evidently presided at the origin of the dances which became peculiar to them, and if the reproach made by the historians, that these dances were lascivious, is well founded, don't doubt that, as in the Chica, this excess lay in the effect of nudity which prevented the delicate nuances which

separate voluptuousness from obscenity.

But the Caribs, who were immigrants themselves, had no idea of these dances of the Indians, whose implacable enemies they were. Whatever the place from which they came to this Archipelago, they surely did not know there any dances inspired by pleasure, their bloody customs would have frightened pleasure away.

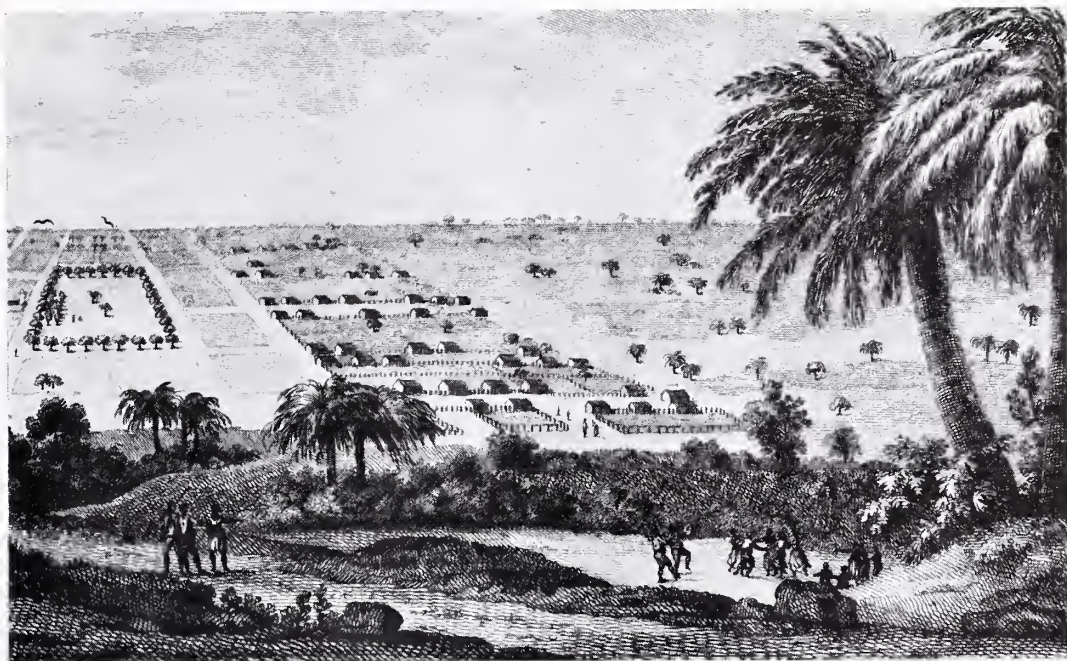
Is it not necessary, rather, to attribute this ingenious discovery to that country, which the fine arts and the purest taste have made immortal; to that country where it was said that Socrates, intoxicated by the pleasure of dancing, demonstrated to what extent the triumph of Aspasia could go? Greece had a temperate climate, and was situated so that its inhabitants, who brought to light every form of sensual pleasure, could easily have spread their seductive doctrines in both Asia and Africa. We know that the Persians, in Asia, have lively and amorous dances. In Egypt, on marriage days, do not dancers come to show the bride, in pleasant pantomime, the still-veiled image of the mysteries which the god Hymen ordains should be celebrated?

It seems to me that in all Asia Minor, the passion for dances which seem to have been inspired by love, is not without analogy to the Chica, and if Horace, the singer of pleasure, felt it his duty to censure the Ionian dance, I have already said that one could also censure the frenzy to which the Chica sometimes leads.

I cannot defend myself from the prejudice which always leads me to Greece, when I remark that there was a Greek dance which depicted the story of Theseus and Ariadne, and was called the *Candiote*, while in Santo Domingo one says of an African or a Creole negro, preoccupied with pleasure and loving the dance above all, that he is *Candiot*. Is it chance which causes such a similarity, and is this chance so important that it is forbidden to seek the origin of the Chica among a race which filled the universe with the sound of its glory, with its fame in all things, especially for its exquisite delicacy in everything which breathes of sensual pleasures?

When one considers again the dance of the Caribs at Saint-Vincent, one will be convinced that the Chica could only have been invented by men whose burning imagination supplied what the eyes were forbidden to perceive.

As for Carlo Blasis, he calmly echoes this theory too, stating confidently, "I am, indeed, almost inclined to believe that the Chica owes its origin to the ancients."



Vue de Bombarde. Engraving by Ponce from illustrations to accompany Moreau's book on French colonial law.

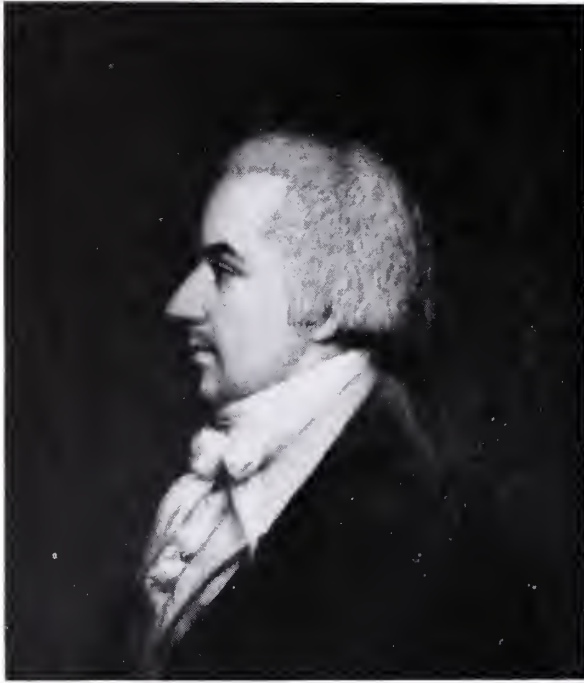
II

THE AUTHOR OF *DANSE*

Médéric Louis Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry was born in Fort Royal, on the island of Martinique, in 1750. His ancestors had come from Poitou during the seventeenth century. He was the favorite of his grandfather, who on his deathbed told him of a secret hiding place where were concealed 66,000 francs, destined for the lad's education. When the old man died, Moreau, instead of keeping the money for himself, assembled the entire family together and shared his little fortune with them. The action was typical of the man who later had engraved on his watch, as a personal motto, *Il est toujours l'heure de faire le bien*.

In spite of his unselfish gesture, Moreau de Saint-Méry got a good education. At the age of nineteen he went to Paris, where he studied so well that he obtained a law degree fourteen months after his arrival. His military service was not neglected, for he became a member of the *garde du roi*. Extremely fond of peasant company, good conversation, parties, and the theatre, he did not let these amiable tastes interfere with his studies. Instead, he formed the habit of going to bed only one night out of three, which gave him plenty of time to enjoy everything!

When he was twenty-two, Moreau de Saint-Méry received the degree of *avocat en parlement*, and returned to Martinique. During his absence in Paris his parents had died, so Moreau, left alone, decided to move to Santo Domingo, the richest of all the islands



Duc de Liancourt, by James Sharples. City Art Gallery, Bristol, England.

of the West Indies. He settled at Cap Français, in 1772, and eight years later was elected a member of the *conseil supérieur* of Santo Domingo.

The King, Louis XVI, commissioned Moreau de Saint-Méry to codify the laws of all the French West Indian colonies. For this work he was obliged to travel widely throughout the islands. On one of these excursions he located the lost tomb of Christopher Columbus, who had been interred in the ancient Cathedral of the town of Santo Domingo. During his travels Moreau also collected material for a projected Encyclopedia which he wished to write, which would be a compendium of all available information about the colonies. He was not so successful in obtaining sponsorship for this project, but Louis XVI soon recalled him to Paris, where he was enabled to complete his work on

Colonial law. Extremely popular among the intellectuals of the capitol, Moreau was one of the founders of the Musée de Paris.

Liberal in his sympathies, Moreau de Saint-Méry was originally a supporter of the revolutionary movement. He served as deputy for Martinique in the Constituante. Chosen an elector of Paris, he was later made President of the body of electors, and for a few days in 1789 was the virtual ruler of Paris.

However, at the accession of Robespierre and the beginning of the reign of terror, Moreau was forced to flee. He took refuge in Normandy, in the town of Forges. Attacked by a maddened mob, he was wounded and arrested, but managed to escape and make his way to Havre. From that port he set sail for the United States, on the brig *Sophie*, on November 9, 1793.

The voyage, delayed by head winds and terrible storms, lasted 119 days. On March 8, 1794, the little ship put in at Norfolk. There Moreau de Saint-Méry encountered a number of old friends from Santo Domingo. The violent slave rebellions had broken out in the previous year, and many of those who had managed to escape with their lives had made their way to the United States. Moreau wrote of these refugees: "Alas! They are the very picture of misery, they who were so infatuated with their riches, and perhaps too vain of their wealth."

Their descriptions of the dreadful conditions in Santo Domingo made Moreau decide to remain in the United States. After a difficult period during which he worked as a shipping clerk, he made his way to Philadelphia, where he managed to set up a book store and printing press.

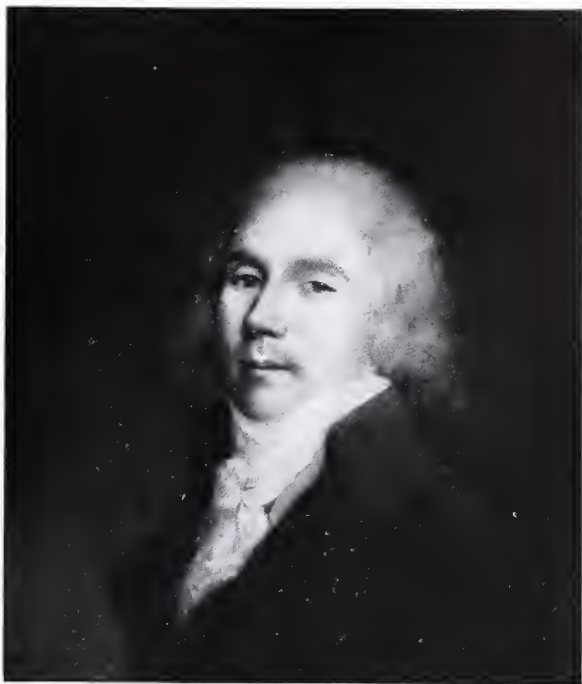
For the next four years Moreau de Saint-Méry lived and worked in Philadelphia, then the thriving capital of the Republic. He already had many friends there, for he had been a member of the American Philosophical Society since 1789. In the collections of

the society, founded by Benjamin Franklin, and still active today, were many ancient archaeological curiosities which he had sent from the West Indies.

Moreau's bookshop, on the south side of Front St., at the corner of Chestnut, soon became the favorite rendezvous for the many distinguished French political exiles then living in Philadelphia. His most intimate friend was Talleyrand, who came to the shop every night at about eight o'clock. Often he would be accompanied by the duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, some of whose works were published by Moreau de Saint-Méry. Other frequent visitors included the duc d'Orleans (the future Louis Philippe), de Noailles, and de Beaumetz. The little group would repair to a room in the rear of the shop and pass a long evening in good conversation, flavored with old French wine. Occasionally Moreau's wife had to caution her guests not to be quite so noisily hilarious, or business would be injured, "because Americans never enter a shop where they hear any noise."

These aristocratic exiles earned a living in various humble ways: the comte de Vallon taught fencing, the Marquis de la Garde taught dancing. Talleyrand devoted most of his energies to attempts to help starving Paris. He arranged for several American ships, loaded with grain, rice, and fish, to be sent for the relief of France. (Even a hundred and fifty years ago, the United States was called upon to feed hungry Europe!) It was because of these activities that Talleyrand was enabled to return to France, in 1796.

In his shop Moreau de Saint-Méry sold music and engravings, books in English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish, and, as a gesture towards the more material needs of his customers, "everything belonging to the Fleecy hosiery manufacture of New York, as foot ankle socks, goutty mittens and stockings, shirts with and without sleeves, drawers,



Talleyrand, by James Sharples. City Art Gallery, Bristol, England.

muffs, etc., elastic garters and gallices of different sizes."

Moreau de Saint-Méry published some dozen books during his stay in Philadelphia. They included two of his own works on Santo Domingo, *Danse*, and (his first publication) an *Essay on the Manner of Improving the Breed of Horses in America*. "The output of this shop," writes H. W. Kent, "had real, individual character, much more, indeed, than most of the books issued in America at this time."

In February, 1798, Moreau de Saint-Méry sat for his portrait to James Sharples, the distinguished English artist whose pastels of famous Americans adorn the walls of Independence Hall, in Philadelphia. Sharples' profile portrait of George Washington is considered one of the best likenesses of the first

President. The Sharples pastel of Moreau de Saint-Méry seems to have disappeared, unless it can be identified in the *Portrait of a Gentleman*, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. The features of this unknown man (see frontispiece) bear an extraordinary resemblance to those found in authenticated portraits of Moreau de Saint-Méry.

Through the intervention of Talleyrand, Moreau de Saint-Méry was enabled to return to France in 1798. He was appointed historiographer to the Ministry of Marine, where he served until Napoleon Bonaparte sent him to Parma as Administrator General. In 1806, however, he fell into disfavor with Napoleon, who failed to appreciate his gentle methods, and was particularly displeased with the easy-going manner in which he had dealt with a mutiny of militia. Moreau de Saint-Méry not only lost his post at Parma, but 40,000 francs in back salary, which the State refused to pay!

Until 1812, Moreau and his family lived through the generosity of the Empress Josephine, who was a distant relative of his wife. Later, he received a small pension from the government, in return for the gift of his enormous collection of prints, maps, sketches, and manuscripts pertaining to the French colonies. He never returned to Santo Domingo. He died in Paris, January 28, 1819.

III

MOREAU DE SAINT-MÉRY AND THE DANCE

Moreau de Saint-Méry was a man of extraordinarily wide general culture. The personal library which was sold at auction after his death attests the amazing breadth and catholicity of his interests. It included volumes on everything from law to music, from exploration, history and politics to early experiments in aviation.

It took thirteen sessions, lasting from De-

cember 15 until December 30, 1819, to dispose of the 1320 separate items listed in the sale catalogue. Among all these books, only two concerned dancing: Compan's *Dictionnaire de la Danse*, published in Paris in 1787, and a ballet libretto, probably dating from Moreau's Parma days, of *Carolina e Mexico*, a dance divertissement by Luigi Bardotti, interpolated in Sarti's opera *Giulio Sabino*. The Compan work is a useful and fairly comprehensive little book, containing definitions of the fundamental ballet positions and steps, the social dances of the day, and the national dances of various countries.

Since, at the sale, item No. 1320 consisted of 1200 different books and pamphlets on the arts, science, and history, it is reasonable to suppose that Moreau possessed other works on dancing which were not individually catalogued. While Moreau de Saint-Méry was active as a publisher and bookseller in Philadelphia, he issued a catalogue of his stock. Although innumerable volumes on the theatre are listed, there is nothing pertaining exclusively to the dance.

The depth and intimacy of Moreau's knowledge of the dance in Santo Domingo was the natural result of his intense preoccupation with everything concerning the island. Another book which he published in Philadelphia in 1796, the year when *Danse* appeared, contains a brief section on dancing in the Eastern, or Spanish half of the island, the part which is now the Dominican Republic:

The Spanish Creoles are not subject to violent emotions, or marked by any very distinctive characteristics. . . . The songs of these islanders are very monotonous, corresponding to their own brand of melancholy, which the French would call sadness. They dance, but in the Moorish fashion, to the sound of a harsh guitar, which complains dolorously of the clumsiness of the fingers which pluck it, or else simply to the sound of a calabash which they shake, or play upon with awkward fingers. It is difficult to recognize such songs and such dances as the children of pleasure.

faire toutes les occasions de m'attirer la bienveillance publique
si mon faible hommage et assidue, j'ai bien senti à son
parvenir le volume de l'Année et ceux d'un autre ouvrage, les
Lettres de notions coloniales par ordre alphabétique, d'après
l'ordre de mention les rassemblant sous différents titres
qui se trouvent entre toutes les colonies françaises.

Les vœux de la cour me retiendront si l'Europe me
de moi que je ne puis pas pour. Tous. si l'Europe
digne m'honore d'une réponse, si la République de l'air
si c'est d'Espagne, pour le souvenir de la République
et si c'est en France, pour le souvenir de la République
Paris, avec mon adresse, Rue de la Harpe, n° 12, à Paris.

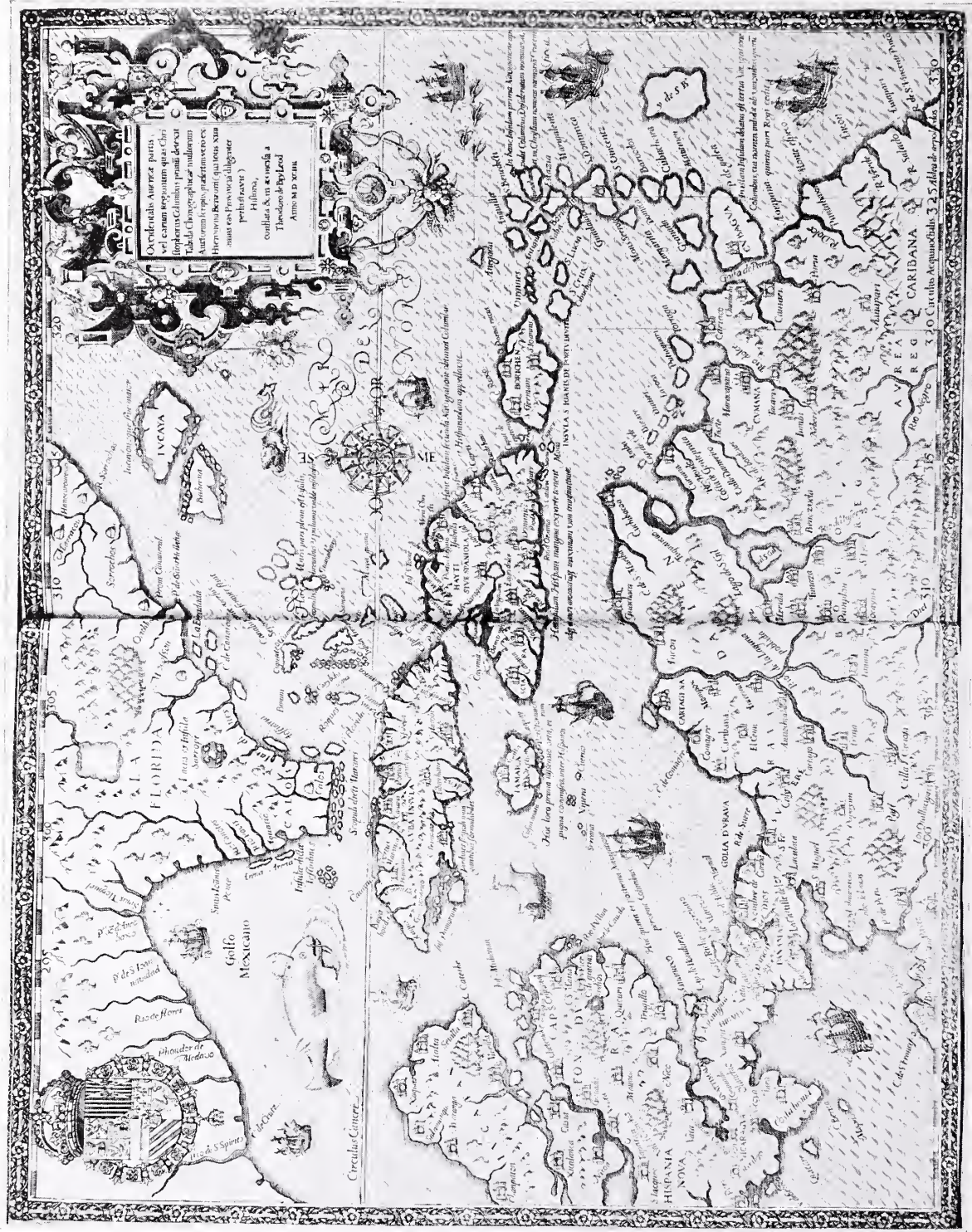
Il y a déjà si longtemps que l'on s'honore d'être présente
à votre excellence à l'égard de la République, laquelle ne
reconnait pas M. Liguier de la République, qui, d'après
mes lettres, que mon nom sera resté dans la mémoire, les
Lettres de président honoraire de la République, me permet de vous
que je ne puis pas sans être auprès de votre excellence.

Je suis sûr que je vous réjouisse encore que tout mon agrément
est en vous. c'est un triomphe de gloire qui m'attend si vous
vous intéressez à la réussite de ma demande, et en
devinant l'objet particulier de vos vœux, si vous pouvez
détourner de moi la reconnaissance à la République de la République
avec laquelle j'ai

Monsieur

De Votre Excellence

Etant humble et très obéissant
serviteur. Moreau



Map of the Carribean. 1594. From de Bry's America.

However, in some places a custom is introduced, which offends all decency. A dance is given, a little fandango, where a young girl, almost always pretty, dances in the center of a circle of spectators who successively throw her their hats. She gathers them up, places them on her head, under her arms, or on the ground like a cup. When her dance is finished, she goes around returning the hats, and from each owner receives a pitiful contribution, the size of which has been standardized by custom, which it is dishonest to refuse and insulting to exceed.

After reading Moreau's description of the Chica, one wonders just what he considered so shocking about this little street dance, which sounds like an ancestor of the famous Mexican Hat Dance.

Moreau's splendid two-volume work on the French section of Santo Domingo (now The Republic of Haiti) also contains lengthy sections on the dance and on the Vaudoux ceremonies. This material is outlined in the chapter of this issue devoted to dance in Haiti, although much of it is simply a repetition of that which had already appeared in *Danse*.

The manuscript journal of Moreau de Saint-Méry's residence in the United States, which was rescued from the dusty files of the Archives Coloniales in Paris by Stewart L. Mims, and published in 1913, contains a detailed study of the city of Philadelphia, where Moreau lived from 1794-98. He was an eager and accurate observer, and little escaped his attention. He noted:

All the young American girls and matrons love dancing, which is a great pleasure for them. The men are only slightly less fond of it. They enjoy this pastime from eight o'clock in the morning until eleven, or in the evening from twilight until very late at night.

I believe that I have already mentioned that for the inhabitants of the United States, dancing is not a matter of display, but of enjoyment. It is quite common to see a grandfather, father, and grandson taking part in the same dance, but even more frequently one sees a grandmother, mother,

and granddaughter dancing together, and if a Frenchman seems surprised at this, he is told that they dance in order to enjoy themselves, not just to follow rules of etiquette.

It is too bad that Moreau de Saint-Méry, with his passion for detail, did not leave us a more particular account of the actual dances which were so popular in Philadelphia, then the capitol of our tiny, brand-new Republic.

The list of Paris Opera dancers found in *Danse*—Guimard, Vestris, Miller, Gardel, and so forth—indicates that Moreau was thoroughly familiar with ballet as an art form. In his study of Philadelphia he also included a brief section on the theatres, making one concise observation: "There are some dancers here who would be about suitable for Nicolet."

Nicolet was the impresario of the Théâtre de la Gaîté in Paris, which gave comic operas, ballets, farces, and vaudeville performances with rope dancers, acrobats, and educated animals. Mlle. Miller, a first-rate ballerina who later became Mme. Gardel, and starred at the Paris Opera, was a graduate of Nicolet's theatre. Moreau must have been fairly accurate in his estimate of talent, for at least two artists then appearing in Philadelphia—Placide, the choreographer, and Spinacuta, the rope dancer—has actually made Paris appearances under the auspices of Nicolet.

In October, 1796, Moreau de Saint-Méry published an American edition of a little handbook of useful knowledge for young people, to aid them in making polite and polished conversation. This was the *Idée Générale, ou Abrégé des Sciences et des Arts*, by Formey, which had appeared in Paris twelve years earlier. It contains a ten-page section of questions and answers on the dance. These were very general, but seem to reflect the ideas of Noverre on the dramatic values of dancing. For example:

D A N S E.
A R T I C L E
EXTRAIT D'UN OUVRAGE

DE M. L. E. MOREAU DE SAINT-MÉRY.

Ayant pour titre : *Répertoire des Nations
Coloniales.*

Par ordre Alphabétique.

A PHILADELPHIE,

Imprimé par l'AUTEUR, Imprimeur-
Libraire, au coin de Front & de Walnut
Streets, N° 84.

1796.

Title page from first edition of "Danse." (coll. Lillian Moore).

- "Q. What is the principal object of the dance?
- A. The same as that so music, the expression of sentiment and passions. A gesture is beautiful only when it depicts sadness, tenderness, pride—in a word, the soul.
- Q. What qualities should the dance have?
- A. Its fundamental character should be the expression of the subject. If, for example, one wishes to express joy, every movement should take on the color of laughter."

The few paragraphs to which we have referred, together with *Danse* itself, comprise the total of Moreau de Saint-Méry's publications on dancing. The huge collection of his manuscripts, preserved in the Paris Archives Coloniales, seems to contain nothing on the dance. Nevertheless, the very fact that, of all his huge 23-volume Encyclopedia of the French colonies, *Danse* was the only portion which he printed, seems to indicate a very special predilection for the subject.

IV

DANSE: THE BOOK

The earliest known American publication dealing with dancing is Increase Mather's *An Arrow Against Profane and Promiscuous Dancing*, issued in Boston in 1684. Paul Magriel, in an article on early American dance tracts, lists three more pamphlets on the evils of dancing which appeared during the eighteenth century.

In the library of the University of Pennsylvania, there is a ballet libretto (*Le Forêt Noir*, by Madame Gardie) published in Boston in 1794, in connection with a series of ballet performances given there. Undoubtedly, other librettos were issued at the same time, but they do not seem to have survived.

Except for these pamphlets, *Danse* is probably the first book on dancing published in the United States.

Danse was written to form part of an enormous encyclopedia to be called the *Répertoire des Notions Coloniales, par Ordre Alphabétique*. As early as 1787 (before *Danse* was written), Moreau de Saint-Méry had written to Benjamin Franklin to ask for his patronage and assistance in publishing this monumental work. At the time of his letter, Moreau de Saint-Méry had already spent thirteen years of research in preparation for the writing of this work, which was to contain articles on every phase of life in the French Colonies.

Although we have no record of Franklin's reply, it would seem that he denied or ignored Moreau's request. This did not discourage the author, for while his letter to Franklin mentions some five volumes, he later expanded his beloved encyclopedia to twenty-three! The manuscript is still in the Archives Coloniales at Paris. The modest little book on dancing is the only portion which has ever seen the light of publication.

Danse was written in Paris in 1789, the year of the outbreak of the French Revolution, when Moreau de Saint-Méry was still one of its ardent champions, the year when he served as President of the Electors of Paris, and ruled the city for three days. It is strange that under such hectic conditions he found time to write an essay on a subject so remote from his political activities.

After Moreau's hasty flight to the United States, his papers were rescued by friends, packed in a trunk, and sent after him across the Atlantic. The manuscript of *Danse* was among this material. An entry in his journal, dated April 23, 1795, describes a jolly and informal evening spent in the back room of his bookshop, where he read *Danse* aloud to three friends: Talleyrand, the Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, and an Englishman with the decidedly un-English name of Guillemard. Talleyrand must have been impressed with the little study, which he likened to "*un joli tableau de l'Albane*."* Nearly a year later, when Moreau decided to publish it, Talleyrand asked for the privilege of correcting the proof. (Incidentally, the great man neglected to notice one error,

on page 2, where *danse* is spelled with a p, *panse*!)

Danse was issued in the spring of 1796. Like the other products of Moreau de Saint-Méry's press, it was printed in Caslon of a neat, clear appearance. The type was set by Moreau's son, who acted as one of his assistants in the shop. It is impossible to discover just how many copies were printed, probably very few, because when Moreau sold his book remainders in June, 1798, prior to returning to France, he had not a single copy of *Danse* to spare, although there were several hundred each of his other publications, such as the two great works on Santo Domingo, his edition of Formey's book for young people, and so forth.

A handful of copies of *Danse* have survived, nevertheless: one in the library of the

Mars and Venus. Francesco Albani. Metropolitan Museum of Art Photo Collection.



* Francesco Albani, a Bolognese painter of the seventeenth century, fond of painting pretty and sentimental scenes from Grecian mythology, was very fashionable towards the close of the eighteenth century. He was called "the painter of the graces." It was probably this phrase which inspired a later critic to compare the dancing of Marie Taglioni with a picture by Albani.

American Philosophical Society at Philadelphia, one at Yale, one in the John Carter Brown Library at Providence, Rhode Island, but none, unfortunately, in the Congressional Library. A few copies were sent to old friends in Santo Domingo, and from Cap Français the vicomte de Rochambeau, son of Washington's aide wrote to Moreau:

"You paint the dances of the Creoles in such vivid colors that I could not resist the temptation to examine at first hand the dances which you describe so well. . . . Well, the result of my observations terminated in a sort of intoxication, which it was easy to calm! The dance is certainly very lively in the tropics."

Later, while Moreau de Saint-Méry was living at Parma, he made the acquaintance of the great printer Bodoni. As a gesture of courtesy towards the Administrator-General, Bodoni, in 1801, printed a charming little edition of *Danse* (under the new title of *De La Danse*) which he presented to Moreau de Saint-Méry as a gift. Two years later there appeared still another edition, also from the Bodoni press.

That was the last of the authorized editions, but about 1830 a Monsieur F. Marquier, "maker of chocolates, manufacturer of tea," at Paris, issued a little book called *Petit Traité Philosophique sur la Danse*, without crediting any author at all. Actually, the new book consisted of the first 33 pages of *Danse*, to which had been added a short new section on theatrical dancing. Of the material lifted directly out of Moreau de Saint-Méry, only a few words were changed. For the names of Guimard, Miller, Saulnier, d'Auberval, Vestris, Gardel, Theodore, Nivelon, and Laborie, "whose every step was directed by the graces," were substituted those of Taglioni, Montessu, Noblet, Albert, Paul, and Coulon. In a further effort to bring the essay up to date, the Gallopade replaced the intriguing Minuet Congo.

M. Marquier's little concoction, which is undated, must have appeared after the Paris debut of Marie Taglioni, which took place in 1827. Actually, the date of the book is important for only one reason. Carlo Blasis's *Code of Terpsicore*, published in London in 1830, contains much of the same material on theatrical dancing as does the opus of the chocolate-seller. One appears to paraphrase the other, although some sentences are as identical as translations can be. The question is, which was written first?

Judging from his brazen appropriation of Moreau de Saint-Méry's material, one would be inclined to think that Blasis was the plagiarist. Of course, Marquier was equally guilty when he pirated the entire first half of *Danse*. It is a puzzling question, but it would be amusing to discover that the great authority Carlo Blasis owed his information not only to the distinguished ex-President of the Electors of Paris, but also to an obscure seller of chocolates and manufacturer of tea.

V

THE DANCE IN HAITI

Danse was written in 1789, and published seven years later. From Moreau de Saint-Méry's little book it is readily seen that dancing had long played an extremely vital part in Haitian life, and its importance on the island has continued to the present day. A complete study of dance in Haiti could easily fill a large volume, so this discussion will be limited to further examination of those particular dances mentioned by Moreau de Saint-Méry, their derivation and the traces of their survival today.

The Carib Indian dances which Moreau witnessed at Saint Vincent seem to have been extremely simple, unimaginative, and monotonous. Early descriptions left by the Spanish conquerors of Hispaniola (as they renamed the island which the aborigines called

Haiti) seemed to indicate that while dancing was one of the favorite pastimes of both the Carib and Arawak tribes, who divided the island at the time of its discovery, it existed only in a most primitive form. Hakluyt, in his *History of the West Indies*, which dates from about 1512, says that dancing played an integral part in Indian religious ceremonies, but he does not give us details of any of the actual steps used. The dance formation seems to have been that of a ceremonial procession:

The King on certain days by messengers and common cryers commanded the subjects of his dominion to be called to celebrate their sacred and religious rites. At which time, neatly dressed after their manner, and painted with divers colors of herbs, as we read the Agathyrsi sometimes did, all the men came, especially the young men: but the women resorted thither naked, without any kind of coloring or painting, if they had never been deflowered, but such as had known a man, covered themselves with breeches only. Both sexes instead of bells, filled their arms, thighs, calves of their legs, and ankles with shells of certain shell fish fastened unto them, which made a sweet rattling sound at every motion, as for the rest, they were all naked. Being thus laden with shells, shaking the earth with their feet, tripping, singing, and dancing, they reverently saluted their King, who sitting in the entrance of a gate, beating on a drum or tabor with a stick, received them coming unto him. . . .

If, after making sacrifices to their gods, the Indians believed that their prayers had been answered favorably, "they went forth cheerfully singing, and making melody, and lifting up their voices in commendation, and spent the whole day in the open air, exercising sports, and dancing. . . ."

Girolamo Benzoni, a Milanese who visited the West Indies some thirty years later, gives more details in his *History of the New World*, where he describes a form of primitive social dance. He observes:

They dance in this way: Two or three hundred, or even three or four thousand, of them assemble together, according to the population of the province, and having carefully swept the place where they are going to dance, one of them comes



Manner of Dancing. Woodcut from the travels of Benzoni in the West Indies. Amsterdam. ca. 1545.

forward to lead the rest. He goes nearly always backwards, turning himself occasionally, and so do all the others, by threes and fours in regular order. Those who beat the drums begin to sing some of their songs, and the man who leads the dance is the first to answer. Then the rest do the same progressively. Some carry a fan in their hand, some a calabash with pebbles in it, some wear feathers on their head, others wear rows of sea-shells on their arms and legs; some turn in one way, some in another; some raise their legs, others flourish their arms; some act the blind man, others pretend to be lame; some laugh, others cry; and thus with many other gestures, and frequently drinking their *cavacate*, they dance all day, and sometimes part of the night also. . . .

This mention of the calabash, or gourd, filled with pebbles, indicates that this type of primitive musical instrument existed in Haiti even before the introduction of negro slaves from Africa, and therefore must be a heritage from the aborigines. It is, of course, familiar as a part of West Indian and South American dance orchestras today.

Later authors drew heavily from the sources quoted above, in discussing the dances of the aborigines. Charlevoix, writing in 1733, said that dancing, playing games, and smoking tobacco, which they carried to such

excess that it induced a form of intoxication, were the chief diversions of the Caribs. He goes on to say:

Their songs served in place of written annals. . . . They were always accompanied by round dances, in which the leader of the song began alone, and the others repeated after him. He arranged the steps and danced them first. He would dance a few steps forward, then a few backwards; the whole company of dancers followed. They never departed from the rhythm or the melody. Sometimes the men danced alone on one side, and the women on the other; at other times the two sexes mingled, and then it made no difference whether a man or a woman began the dance. But during public festivals, and on important occasions, they sang and danced to the sound of a drum, and it was usually the most important member of the community, the Chief himself, who beat the instrument.

Thomas Jefferys, writing in 1760 but referring to a much earlier period, gives an account of the Carib temperament which coincides rather well with the impression which their descendants made upon Moreau de Saint-Méry many years later:

Both sexes were of a weak constitution, a phlegmatic temper, somewhat melancholy, and lived almost upon nothing. A crab or a burgot served them a whole day, whence they could not but be feeble, and destitute of vigor and strength, they never worked, and gave themselves no concern about anything, and past their lives in the most indolent manner imaginable. After spending part of the day in dancing, if they were at a loss for something to do, they went to sleep.

In contrast to this, Harold Courlander, leading authority on music and dance of Haiti today, cites a *Danse Gabienne*, believed to have originally been a dance of the Carib Indians, which is fast, animated, and relaxing. *Gabienne* is thought to be a corruption of the word "Caribbean."

Negro slaves were introduced in Haiti by the Spanish conquerors, who nearly succeeded in exterminating the Caribs and Arawaks. By the middle of the eighteenth century the negroes formed by far the greater part

of the population of the island. Their owners, the wealthy sugar and indigo planters, lived in feudal splendor. The western half of the island, which now forms the Republic of Haiti, was ruled by the French and was known as French Santo Domingo. The eastern portion, now the Dominican Republic, was under Spanish domination. The negro slaves, through imitation, observation, and also through intermarriage and concubinage, took on many of the characteristics of their French and Spanish owners. The negro heritage remained, nevertheless, predominantly African.

The first writer to pay much attention to the fascinating tribal dances which had been transplanted from Africa to the West Indies was Père Labat, who spent several years in the islands at the very end of the seventeenth century. In his *Nouveau Voyage aux Isles de l'Amérique*, published at the Hague in 1724, he describes a Calenda which he witnessed in Martinique. Although the formations of the dance are quite different (in Moreau de Saint-Méry's day each man danced with his own partner, whereas Père Labat places the men in one line and the women in another) this Calenda has much in common with that observed in Santo Domingo nearly a century later. Speaking of the slaves, Labat says:

The dance in which they take the greatest pleasure is the Calenda. It came from the Guinea Coast and to all appearances from Ardra. The Spaniards have learned it from the negroes and throughout America dance it in the same way as do the negroes.

As the postures and movements of this dance are most indecent the masters, who live in an orderly way, forbid it to their slaves, and take care that they do not dance it, and this is no small matter; for it is so much to their taste, that even little children who are as yet scarcely strong enough to stand, strive to imitate their fathers and mothers whom they see dancing, and will spend entire days at this exercise. . . .

The dancers are drawn up in two lines, one before the other, the men on one side and the women on the other. Those who are tired of dancing and the spectators make a circle around the

dancers and the drums. The more adept chants a song which he composes on the spur of the moment, on some subject which he thinks appropriate, the refrain of which, chanted by all the spectators, is accompanied by a great clapping of hands. As for the dancers, they hold their arms almost in the manner of those who dance while playing castanets. They jump, make some turns, approach within two or three feet of each other, draw back in cadence until the sound of the drums directs them to draw together, striking the thighs one against the other, that is to say the men against the women. To all appearances it seems that the stomachs are hitting, while as a matter of fact it is the thighs that receive the blows. They retire at once, turning around, to begin the same move-

ment again, with absolutely lascivious gestures, as often as the drum gives the signal, as it often does several times in succession. From time to time they interlace arms and make two or three turns always striking the thighs and kissing. One easily sees from this abbreviated description how indecent this dance is. . . .

Certainly the Calenda with which Moreau de Saint-Méry was familiar was a much more restrained dance, with its simple step "similar to the *Anglaise*." Not even the Chica was quite so uninhibited as this early Calenda, which surely must have been a direct importation from Africa.

Primitive religious dance ceremony in Haiti. 18th century engraving after de Bry.



As early as 1765, the Governor General's guard at Santo Domingo was instructed that one of its duties was "to break up the assemblies and Calendas of the Negroes." Another order, dated 1772, forbade the slaves and even the freedmen from holding night dances or Calendas, while the dances that were permitted had to end at 9 P.M. These regulations originated in the well-founded fear that the germ of rebellion could easily be nurtured at such meetings. When the great slave insurrections broke out in 1793, it was found that the desire for revolt had been stimulated at just such surreptitious gatherings, where the native African dances had inflamed the emotional negroes.

There was no such ban, of course, on European dances, and many of the domestic servants were, as Moreau de Saint-Méry pointed out, quite proficient in French contredanses and the minuet. Sir William Young, who visited his estates in the West Indies in 1791-92, has left several interesting paragraphs on this subject. Although he is writing of St. Vincent, conditions there were very similar to those on the great plantations of Santo Domingo. Describing a Christmas festival, he writes:

About ten in the forenoon the negroes of my estate, both men and women, exceedingly well dressed, came to wish us a Merry Christmas: soon after came two negro fiddlers and a tambourine, when we had an hour's dancing, and carpenter Jack, with Phyllis, danced an excellent minuet, and then four of them began a dance not unlike a Scotch reel. . . .

We had a large company to dinner, and in the evening I opened the ball in the great court, with a minuet with black Phyllis: our music consisted of two excellent fiddles, Johnny and Fisher, from my Pembroke estate, and Grandison, tambourine of the villa: there stood up about eighteen couples, the men negroes were dressed in the highest beauiism, with muslin frills, high capes, and white hats; one beau had a large fan. The negro girls were all dressed up gay and fine, with handkerchiefs folded tastefully about their heads, and gold earrings and necklaces: the girls were nearly all

field-negroes, there are but four female slaves as domesticks in the villa. . . . This moment a new party of musicians arrived with an African *Balaso*, an instrument composed of pieces of hard wood of different diameters, laid in a row over a sort of box: they beat on one or the other so as to strike out a good musical tune. They played two or three African tunes; and about a dozen girls, hearing the sound, came from the huts to the great court, and began a curious and most lascivious dance, with much grace as well as action; of the last plenty in truth. . . .

Of another celebration, at St. John's, he writes:

February 2, 1792. Being a day which I had allotted for a holiday to the negroes, we went early to the valley of the old road. In the morning I distributed ten barrels of herrings to the negroes, and in the evening we had a very smart well-dressed negro ball in the hall of my old mansion. Mr. L. and myself both impartially allowed the negroes, young men and girls, to dance better in step, in grace, and correctness of figure, than our fashionable, or indeed any couples at any ball in England; taking that ball generally, there is no negro dances ill. I danced a country dance with old Hannah, and a minuet with long Nanny. . . .

In spite of all the disorders of the slave rebellions and the ten bloody years of the struggle for freedom, followed by the establishment of a black Empire and finally the present-day Republic of Haiti, this heritage of colonial days, the minuet, still survives on the island. In 1910 Eugene Aubin saw a minuet danced in the hills of the Grand Bois to the sound of old violins which had been passed down from generation to generation. As late as 1939 Harold Courlander witnessed a real minuet in the mountains south of Léogane.

Other dances borrowed from the French, which are still popular among the peasants of Haiti, include the Lancers, the Contredanse, Quadrilles, the Polka (a later innovation, of course!), the Mazurka, and the Waltz!

The Baron de Wimpffen, who visited Haiti just before the rebellion, was much impressed

by the voluptuous Chica. Writing from Jacmel, in French Santo Domingo, in May 1798, he says:

It is usually after sun-set that these dances take place among the people of color; dances, in which the female more especially, discover such justness of movement, such volubility of reins, that the quickest eye can with difficulty seize a few shades of the rapid and fugitive development of their lascivious graces.

Of these danees, which may be truly styled characteristic, the *Gragement* and the *Chica* are the most esteemed: never did voluptuousness in motion spread a more seducing snare for the eager and insupportable love of pleasure:—hence, to dance the *Chica*, is considered the supreme good; and I confess, with no little confusion, that the austerity of my principles never prevailed so far as to interdict me from the enjoyment of this singular spectacle, as often as it was in my power.

The orchestra is composed of one or two fiddles, much superior in the talents which their occupation requires, to the majority of our European scrapers. They have still another advantage over them; that of never being the passive instrument of the pleasure of others, for they enter so deeply into the spirit of the entertainment, that the part of the body which is seated, moves in perfect unison with the foot which beats measure, and the hand that conducts the bow.

Michel-Etienne Descourtilz, a French naturalist who spent four years in Haiti at the turn of the century, describes the Chica much as Moreau de Saint-Méry did: "The Chica, a negro dance, consists in moving the hips and loins while the rest of the body maintains a quiet balance which is not upset even by the voluptuous gestures of the arms."

Descourtilz also gives a striking example of the universal applicability of the Chica and the Calenda:

A Creole negress, Ursula, had just lost Francois, her lover. She seemed inconsolable for this premature loss, when she came to me to ask for a sheep for the Calenda. The *banzas* and the *bamboulas* were already outside and were only waiting for the participants in the dance; none of the numerous procession had yet arrived when Ursula came out of the house, her eyes bathed in tears, a handkerchief in her hand, her chest heaving with sobs. "*Francois li allé,*" she said, "*Pauvre*

Francois! Pauvre n'homme à moué qui mourir!" Then, sobbing, she walked with head bowed, beginning her lamentations again and again, until, as the funeral dance began, at first almost unconsciously and then gradually growing stronger, still weeping, she began to dance the Chica for Francois, singing and sobbing at the same time, "*Quittez-moi danser pour li, quittez-moi danser pour li!*"

Descourtilz considered the Calenda primarily a funeral dance. He notes that the soldiers of Dessalines, the leader of the slaves who later became Emperor of Haiti, used to dance a Calenda in honor of the dead whenever one of their number was killed or executed.

Both Descourtilz and the Baron de Wimpffen mention the *Gragement*, which Descourtilz explains as a form of the Chica. This variation was ignored by Moreau de Saint-Méry, although *grager* was a regular verb in the Creole tongue, signifying a particular manner of dancing. In twentieth-century Haiti a souvenir of the *Gragement* is found in the *Grage*, a sort of stick made of hardwood, into which ridges have been cut, and a scraper made of a small piece of bamboo. This rough wooden scraper, said to be a heritage from the aboriginal Indians, is now used at social dances, and once was probably an indispensable accompaniment of the *Gragement*.

It would be interesting to discover the origin of the name of the Chica. Eighteenth-century authors frequently warned European travellers about a certain type of insect found in Santo Domingo, called the *chique*. Burrowing under the skin, especially on the feet, it caused the skin to burn like fire. Could *Chica* be derived from this word, as the name of the Neapolitan Tarantella is taken from that of the spider?

And does the Chica survive today? Courlander is of two minds on this question. Writing in 1939, he said: "Moreau de Saint-Méry mentioned the Chica, a dance which does not appear to be known today in Haiti." But five years later, in a lecture, he casually

mentioned the Chica in a list of popular contemporary social dances of the island: "the Pinyique, Pastorelle, Ciyé, Chica," and so forth.

There are certainly several West Indian dances which bear a strong resemblance to Moreau de Saint-Méry's Chica. Courlander's own account of the *Congo Mazonne* is very much like it:

The Congo is more definitely a contredanse than any of the others of African origin. Men and women may pair off, but never embrace as in the Bal. Embracing, in African terms, is a lack of restraint and sophistication. The arms are stretched out as though to embrace, however, so that they almost surround, without touching the waist of the partner. Facing one another, they approach until they almost touch, dance as mirrored reproductions, then recede. Loin movement is free, although not necessarily with direct sexual implications. There is a tensivity in the Congo not known to most of the other dances. . . .

Lafcadio Hearn, in a letter to H. E. Krehbiel, dated 1885, describes a Congo which he witnessed in New Orleans, which certainly sounds like a direct descendant of the Chica:

They sang a purely African song to the accompaniment of a drygoods box beaten with a stick or bones and a drum made by stretching a skin over a flour-barrel. As for the dance—in which the women do not take their feet off the floor—it is as lascivious as is possible. The men dance very differently, like savages leaping into the air. . . .

Krehbiel adds:

The word Congo, as applied to a negro dance which is still remembered in Louisiana, is, I fancy, a generic term there, though it is also used in French Guiana for a dance called Chica in Santo Domingo and the Windward Isles.

Joseph J. Williams believes that the Chica survives in a dance called the *loiloichi*, tracing the derivation of the name from the combination of *Chica* with *loi* (a corruption of the French *roi*), which is a word of Voodoo religious symbolism. This sounds a little far-fetched, especially since his description of the

loiloichi resembles a dance of religious hysteria rather than the sexual duet described by Moreau de Saint-Méry.

Other recent writers on music and dance in Haiti, such as Friedenthal and Flerida de Nolasco, do not mention the Chica at all. Neither does Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

The Calenda does definitely survive, and under the same name. However, according to Courlander, it is no longer the pleasant social dance of the eighteenth century, but has become closely identified with a dreaded secret society, the *Société Vinbindingue*, which is dedicated to the most evil aspects of Haitian religion, including "Zombiism" and the sacrifice of human life.

Moreau de Saint-Méry was the first authority to describe the Vaudoux (now called Voodoo or Vodoun) dances and ceremonials. In *Danse* he does not mention the religious significance of Vaudoux, but he was fully aware of it, for in his book on the French section of Santo Domingo he devotes a great deal of attention to it, with a long passage explaining actual ceremonies which he had witnessed. Haitian Voodoo is a very complicated subject, one to which numerous volumes have been devoted, and discussion of it would be out of place here. It is sufficient to mention that, according to both Courlander and Herskovitz, there survive some Voodoo dances which are still purely social, with none of the ecstatic ritual possession, mystic symbolism, and evil connotations usually suggested by the word.

The Don Pedro, which Moreau said had been strictly suppressed because of its extravagant excesses, has also survived as part of a whole system of ritual and sorcery which has its own followers, just as does Voodoo. A wealth of legend has grown up around the character of Don Pedro, or Pétro, and old men in the hills around Leogane, where he is said to have lived, tell fantastic stories about how he was able to change his sex at

will, to make himself invisible, or take on the shapes of different animals.

Courlander gives an excellent account of Pédro dancing. The accompaniment is provided by two drums.

The second drum carries the rhythm which governs the dancing. Foot movement is highly important, and while it could never be said of Haitian dancing that loins and shoulders are negligible, here, at least, it is primarily a foot dance, and a difficult one. The second drum beats: "rest-two-three," on "two" the right foot pushes forward, in a thrusting, sliding motion; and then on "three" the left moves outward and the right moves in. The position is held on the first count, although there is no visible rest, inasmuch as the dance is fast.

Pairing off, while not a part of the basic pattern, is seen frequently in Pétro. Women sometimes use a Congo pose, with the left hand on the hip and the right arm held outward, a gesture which lends a good deal of grace to what might otherwise be rather violent athletics. Pétro music has a power to incite, and while the dance has self-imposed restraints there are generally fewer of them than in the Vodoun.

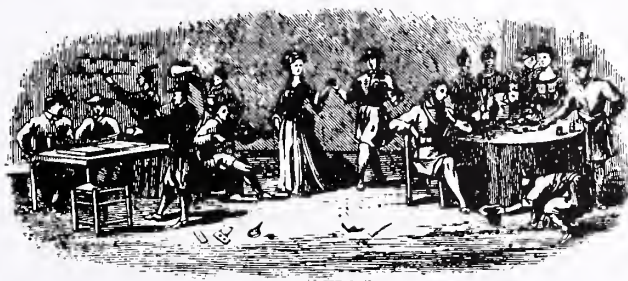
The Bamboula drum, described by Moreau, has given its name to a social dance which is often used at work-gatherings, for instance, at the building of a house. The drum itself has survived as the simple Bula, while the drummer who leads the orchestra is called the Bulatier. Courlander describes

the Bula as a drum 17 or 18 inches high, and 7 or 8 inches in diameter, made from a hollowed log. The drumheads are covered with cowhide, held in place with hardwood pegs. The Bula is played with two slender sticks, while the drums used in accompanying the Pétro dances are played only with the hands, and have heads of goatskin. The rattles first used by the Indians, and later noted by Moreau de Saint-Méry, are exactly the same today.

There remains one more dance, which was not mentioned at all in *Danse*, but which must have come to the attention of Moreau de Saint-Méry, since it is illustrated in the volume of plates issued in Paris to illustrate his book on French Santo Domingo. (See Plate, p. 240, "Nègres Jouant au Bâton.")

Lafcadio Hearn saw a stick dance in Martinique, where they called it a Calenda. It was danced by men only, stripped to the waist, twirling heavy sticks as though in a mock fight. Courlander describes another, seen about 1939:

Sometimes there is a stick dance, each participant holding a baton which he strikes against that of the person on each side. Some of the dancers move clockwise, some counterclockwise, all hitting their sticks with great precision. There is much reversing and backtracking, and at certain times the dancers all crouch on their heels, continuing to strike with their batons.



Merry-making.

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